Career learning in a changing world: the role of emotions

Meijers, F.; Wardekker, W.L.

published in
International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling
2003

document version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling **24:** 149–167, 2002.

Career learning in a changing world: The role of emotions

F. MEIJERS
Prinsenlaan 24, 6542 TB Nijmegen, the Netherlands

Abstract. Existing theories of career learning do not adequately take into account the uncertain and rapidly changing conditions for careers in the modern world. Specifically, they view emotions, such as anxiety and uncertainty, as obstacles for career learning and career identity construction. We suggest a different model of identity construction in which we explicitly examine how coping with such emotions may be necessary for real changes in identity. In such a process, emotions are related to metaphors and concepts available in the cultural community, which are then given a personal meaning. Finally, we examine how such a view might change career counseling.

1. The growing career uncertainty and the need for career identity

Until quite a short time ago, careers – especially in Europe – were mainly tied to a specific occupation and a limited number of possible companies. Retraining and re-education were outside the purview of most working people. The rise of a knowledge economy has led to a flexibilization of labor relations that is still expanding. This expansion is not so much in numerical terms (temporary and on-call employment),[1] but more in terms of functional flexibility. For example, multiple employability and the number of people working outside their original occupation are still rising (Bridges 1994; Bros 2001). This not only implies a diminishing clarity over occupational requirements, but also a diminishing number of reasonably stable communities of labor within which the socialization into and identification with an occupation can take place. Another consequence is that competencies once acquired do not suffice for a longer time any more: flexibility and the ability to keep learning have become more important than specific occupational knowledge and skills.

Formerly, careers primarily developed vertically. That is, promotion normally occurred within a single company (lifetime employment) and often within the occupation in which one started, and depended primarily on the number of years in service. Now, however, careers are less and less dependent on occupation and company: the so-called 'boundary- less career' (Arthur 1994; Arthur, Inkson & Pringle 1999). The pressure on the working population to become more mobile and flexible is increasing steadily. Consequently, individuals are subjected to more career risks and have to develop into

competent career actors, in order to make adequate use of opportunities. Modern employees must become 'reflexive practitioners' to stay employable. They must also develop the competency to continually explicate the meaning of what they do, both for the organization for which they work and in relation to their own life (Drucker 1993; Onstenk 1997; Castells 1998; Ellström 1999). As all discussions of employability show (for an overview see Collin & Young 2000; Kessels & Poell 2001), the modern employee must continually explore both the internal and the external job markets, while at the same time building an affective bond with the labor organization in which they actually are working. This competency to identify with and actively explore the world of work may (following Marcia 1966, 1980) be called the competency to construct a career identity. It would appear that this is much more important nowadays than it was some decades ago. In the present situation, one needs to be able to make career decisions that not only take into account a much wider range of possibilities, but also are founded in one's own feelings and emotions.

This fact is widely recognized and accepted in the practice of career guidance and counseling: methods making ample use of the expression of and reflections upon emotions – such as the self-confrontation method (Hermans & Hermans 2001), biographical methods (Hansen 1999) and value-based personality development (Bellman 1996; Hall 1996; Pulley 1997) – are increasingly popular. However, in cognitive learning theories, which presently dominate thinking about career guidance and counseling, identity formation and the role of emotions are almost completely ignored.

2. Identity and uncertainty in cognitivist career learning theories

Both in social cognitive career theory (Lent et al. 1994, 1999) and in the career learning theory of Krumboltz (1996; Krumboltz & Worthington 1999), the central idea is that the choice of an occupation or occupational direction is the result of an interaction between career-oriented self efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals. Confidence in efficacy and expectations about the outcomes of actions are both seen as the results of two learning processes. The first process concerns the learning that takes place because of success or failure in a certain area (positive or negative reinforcement). The second process involves 'vicarious learning', meaning the imitation of behavior which is valued positively by the group that one wants to be a part of. Self-confidence, combined with positive expectations for the results of one's actions, generates occupational desires. Based on these desires, career decisions are made and occupations chosen. Learning experiences – or the room for them – are partly determined by ethnicity and gender (for a convenient model see Byars & Hackett 1998).

Social cognitive career theory and Krumboltz's career learning theory seem to have little affinity with the problem we described in the first paragraph: building a career identity under uncertain conditions. Rather, they mirror – on a conceptual level – the conditions for career choices in a stable industrial society. By this, we mean a society in which the world of labor was characterized by stable 'communities of practice' (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998), and in which many occupations coincided with accepted social roles. Under these conditions, actual career orientation and occupation choice occurred – at least in Western European countries – on the shop-floor (Heinz et al. 1985; Lange & Neuser 19985; Dincher 1987; Sarges et al. 1998). Of course, most of the youth already had an occupational preference during their education and training. However, this preference often turned out to be either rather instable (primarily for those with a lower level of education) or so vague that many options were often kept open (primarily by those with a higher education) (Meijers 1992, 1995).

'Making an informed choice', for many years the Leitmotiv of career services, had (in the quickly expanding doctrine of educational credentialism) been primarily applied to the choice of further education and training, while being almost irrelevant for the choice of an occupation or profession. Against this backdrop, it is understandable that young people made a more or less definitive career choice based on their experience in their first jobs, which normally was situated within the 'zone of acceptable alternatives', as described by Gottfredson (1981, p. 557). The process of career choice was, in other words, largely a process of institutionalized socialization (Wijers & Meijers 1996). Stable communities of practice made vicarious learning and learning from success and failure possible. Anxiety and uncertainty related to career learning were rather less prominent than nowadays. This is partly because social relations (within and for which learning had to take place) were more transparent, and partly because unemployment did not entail existential insecurity, because a new job was often quickly found.

3. Uncertainty and negative emotions in identity learning

The disappearance of occupations with clear social roles and (often) clear career paths, the disappearance of lifetime employment and the new necessity to change occupations or functions regularly frighten employees (Wallulis 1998). They prefer to remain with the same employer. Even when – in recent years in the Netherlands – the demand for labor increased explosively (in 1999 there were 170,000 open jobs and 905,000 were filled, CBS 2001, pp. 205–206), the mean time that an employee spent with the same employer was only a month shorten than two years previous (Singerling & De Kleer 2000).

Young persons also become insecure in a more general sense. The greater part of contemporary youth exhibit a 'consumptive orientation to life' and shrink from a concrete commitment to the societal role and position of adults (Deutsche Shell 2000; Dieleman 2000; Wittebrood & Keuzenkamp 2000). Other research shows that the youth today are very conscious of the uncertainty of their future. Some two-thirds of the German youth do not have confidence in their own future. This is almost 25% more than in the same research conducted in 1991 (Jugendwerk der Deutschen Shell 1997). In 2000, confidence in their future has grown, but youngsters are not optimistic at all (Deutsche Shell 2000). More than one-third of the American youth is dissatisfied and pessimistic with regard to their prospects for the future, as opposed to 20% in the seventies (Grusky & Rice 1998). Some 75% of the German youth agrees with the statement that everything has become so uncertain that one must be prepared for anything and everything (Heitmeyer et al. 1995; Holtappels et al. 1997). Some 40% of Belgian young adults consider the future too uncertain to plan far in advance (Elchardus et al. 1997). More than one-third of the Italian youth perceives considerable risks in making decisions with regard to their own future (profession, partner), but also accepts this as an inescapable characteristic of modern life (Buzzi et al. 1997).

The knowledge that their future is uncertain elicits negative emotions among many young people. More than a third of the Dutch youth feels afraid when they think about the future (van der Linden 1991) and worries about their own future, with 20% worrying a great deal. (Scholierenonderzoek 1994). In 2000, their worries have decreased somewhat, but a vast majority of them still feels insecure (Wittebrood & Keuzenkamp 2000). Choquet and Ledoux (1994) report that almost 25% of the French youth is wrestling with feelings of despair concerning their future. Finally, Heitmeyer et al. (1995) have observed that many young people become aggressive because of uncertainty.

The acquisition of the competence to construct an identity has become, in modern society, a learning process that – for many young people – simply begins with uncertainty and the negative emotions that arise from such uncertainty. Young people nowadays especially experience the growing impossibility of acquiring sufficient domain-specific self-confidence in order to undertake the learning tasks needed to build an identity, in light of the large degree of uncertainty surrounding them. In most Western societies, the educational system – which can be qualified as a 'pedagogical reserve' in which young people from acquiring learning experiences in the 'real world'. In addition, they can profit little from the learning experiences of their own parents, because the demands placed on them are largely different from those that were imposed on their parents.

The change in demands can be associated with what has been called the "condition of post-modernity". In order to function successfully in society today, individuals must learn to handle the risks of post-modernity (Beck 1994). In this learning process, they can only make partial use of the experiences of previous generations. A major characteristic of post-modern society is, after all, individualization and the disappearance of the "grand narratives" of the past (Lyotard 1984, 1992). Individuals stand largely alone when they want to become a subject (i.e., a person who has control over his/her life) and acquire the "actor competencies" necessary for this (Wijers & Meijers 1996). They are also confronted by the large degree of uncertainty that is a consequence of rapidly changing social-cultural and social-economic relations.

The social cognitive career theory and the career learning theory consider negative emotions like anxiety and insecurity as a hindrance to learning – following Bandura's (1986) social learning theory. According to this theory, an individual will learn only when he or she believes in his or her own competence. Time and again, research shows that the most robust source for this belief is the personal experience of mastery of a task (Byars & Hackett 1998; Lent et al. 1999). From the conditions mentioned above, it can be concluded that – from the perspective of cognitive career theory and career learning theory – the majority of young people must have insufficient self-confidence with respect to 'identity learning', and that they will follow a coping, rather than a learning, process. In other words, if these theories are valid, young people's identities must be at risk.

Research results in the area of identity development in young people contradict such a conclusion. In spite of their insecurity and anguish, young people are able to independently construct an identity that differs from that of their parents. Most young people are busy formulating their own life (Deutsche Shell 2000; Wittebrood & Keuzenkamp 2000). The great majority of them feel that they are the master of their own fate (Alsaker & Flammer 1999), and they feel ready, willing, and able to explore (Eurobarometer 1997). Also, the young of today devote much more energy (and probably time) to finding their own direction and identity in life than their contemporaries of forty years ago. Table 1 shows that identity concerns have shifted and young people have become more occupied with problems of career and personal identity. Asked about their biggest problem in life, adolescents in 1945 most often mentioned sexual problems. They worried about how to behave with or relate to the other sex, and particularly about how far they could go sexually. The sexual moral problems were followed at some distance by problems relating to career choice, school, and study. Social intercourse was hardly considered a problem at that time.

Table 1. The five answers most frequently given by male adolescents to the question of what is the biggest problem in life, in 1945 (N = 2000) and 1990 (N = 5491), in %

My biggest problem is:	1945	My biggest problem is:	1990
Sexual moral problems	21	School problems	32
Career	17	Personal identity/self-concept	21
School and study	11	Family problems	17
Financial problems	4	Social intercourse	9
Intercourse, friendship etc.	6	Love/sexuality	5
Total	63	Total	84

The five main problems listed by young people in 1990 show quite a different picture. School problems predominate and constitute 32% of all problems. Gibson et al. (1991, 1992) state that this category includes questions relating to the utility of investing in an education, as well as problems caused by the tremendous pressure imposed by parents and teachers on students to perform well. In 1990, identity or self-concept problems were mentioned as frequently as the most important problem in 1945, when identity problems were not mentioned at all. Family problems, which were also not mentioned in 1945, occupied third place in 1990.

Such results show that the cognitivist model may not be applicable to this situation. It seems not true that negative emotions inhibit learning. Of course, there *is* a great deal of empirical evidence which demonstrates that negative emotions in a learner stimulates a coping response, and that this coping response is aimed at re-establishing one's self confidence, primarily by avoiding the learning task (Boekaerts 1991). At second glance, however, the available evidence appears to demonstrate only that learners – when confronted with a task that appears, in their own view, to exceed their abilities – tend to avoid the negative feelings that this situation may evoke. They will also continue to do so as long as the expected benefits of their coping behavior exceed the expected costs. The determining factor is therefore not whether a learning task evokes a positive or negative emotion, but whether the learner can permit – in his own eyes – his learning behavior to be determined by his emotions. In the case that a learning task evokes negative emotions, the first reaction will undoubtedly be coping behavior. However, this reaction is primarily a reflex, or physical response, as neuro-scientists like Pinker (1997) and Damasio (1999) demonstrate. When the task – even if it appears to exceed one's abilities – cannot be ignored, due to the potential damage that ignoring it might cause, this reflex then has to be suppressed. Research in the area of,

for example, psychotherapy and mourning processes shows that individuals indeed are capable of doing this under such circumstances (see below).

As stated before, social cognitive career theory and career learning theory implicitly presuppose a relatively stable society with clear role models, normative sanctions, and free-market conditions. For it is only under these conditions that performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, and verbal persuasion can be seen as the most important learning experiences. The individual is seen as a rational actor, who is motivated to maximize his self-interests. Bandura (1986) and his followers portray human beings as an "economic man". However, according to Simon (1976), the individual in a risky society acts more like an "administrative man", i.e., as a problem solver, acting with a bounded rationality, and searching for satisfactory solutions rather than maximizing rewards.

4. Towards a different view of identity learning and emotions

The word 'identity' is interpreted in many ways, both in daily life and in psychological and educational theories. Words such as 'personality' or 'identity' – in our view – do not indicate some intrinsic property of a human being, or the result of social ascription processes. Instead, they point at the ongoing activity of trying to make sense of oneself and what one is doing and experiencing, of one's past, present, and future. An individual does so by constructing and negotiating (with and for itself and others) a more or less consistent image of itself. This image involves one's relation to the world and the activities that one participates in. This activity of identity construction is itself cultural-historical in nature, in the double sense that it takes place under specific historical conditions, and that it uses the artifacts (such as role models, ways of saying and seeing, concepts) available in a specific cultural situation. It is not 'the social' in general that influences an individual's growth directly, but specific cultural practices containing these artifacts that act as a 'middle ground' between the individual and society. Thus, identity is a relational concept, pertaining to an individual in specific cultural practices. People define who they are within activities and institutions, and in negotiating their position, their style, and their action possibilities within them. We understand 'identity' as the ever-changing configuration of interpretations that an individual attaches to herself, as related to the activities that she participants in. Holland et al. (1998, p. 40) describe the identity process as follows: "Persons develop more or less conscious conceptions of themselves as actors in socially and culturally constructed worlds, and these senses of themselves, these identities, to the degree that they are conscious and objectified, permit their persons, through the kinds of semiotic mediation

described by Vygotsky, at least a modicum of agency or control over their own behavior". Conscious and objectified identity conceptions predominantly make use of language concepts arranged into personality narratives. These narratives and their constituting conceptions, we want to point out, are not already existing cognitive schemas or concepts, nor are they totally idiosyncratic; rather, they are *interpretations* of concepts as they exist in the culturally constructed worlds in which the person participates.

This implies that identity is not something that happens to you, but something (mainly, a self-narrative) that you try to *construct* with the help of culturally available building materials. In that sense, it is also a learning process: just as we construct our knowledge about the world with the help of knowledge that is culturally made available to us, we also construct our identities. In fact, the relations between the two runs even deeper than just an analogy: 'real' learning about the world (real in a constructivist sense; see Simons 2000) involves our ways of looking at it and at our own position in it. Information only obtains meaning or significance for one's life when it is assimilated into one's life story (Polkinghorne 1988). Real learning *is* identity learning. Moreover, we should note that these learning processes are always situated. They occur in specific cultural activity settings that always differ in terms of time, place, and power relations.

Describing identity learning as a construction process sounds as if it is a very intellectual and rational process. However, we think that *emotions* are involved, and even have a key role in the process. Research into significant changes in the life course suggests that emotions have a more important place in identity-forming learning processes than is accorded them in learning theories dominant at this moment. Following Erikson (1968), one can assume that identity development occurs due to crises that form a demarcation point in the life course. Lehr (1978) asked adults to indicate events that they had experienced as such demarcation points. The essence of such a point turned out to be the individual's change of perspective. A significant event causes 'existential insecurity', forcing the individual to see himself – and often others too – in a different perspective. Often, another person holds a mirror to the individual, and/or conceptualizes the uncertainty, which the individual himself is as yet unable to put into words (cf. Friebel et al. 2000). Literature on the experience of dying and mourning shows the same (Kübler-Ross 1971; Faulkner 1930; Pearson 1969; Shepard 1975). Following Mezirow (1985, p. 20), the change of perspective may be defined as "gaining a clearer understanding of oneself by identifying dependency-producing psychological assumptions acquired earlier in life that have become dysfunctional."

At first, fear and uncertainty do indeed play the role in this process that cognitive learning theories assume. The individual that gets into such exist-

ential insecurity is initially unwilling to accept their situation, because he is forced to relinquish earlier ties and commitments often entered into during primary socialization. The individual tries to recover his sense of well-being, either by trying to avoid the situation that causes insecurity, or by finding other ways to cope with it. However, this is not always possible. Many of the 'demarcation points' appear to the individual as *fait accompli*, e.g., the death of a loved one or contracting a serious disease, that ultimately cannot be ignored. Thus, the emotion summoned by such an event cannot be permanently denied, and must become the object of reflection.

According to Damasio (1999), avoiding an uncertainty-producing situation is not a conscious action strategy, but the result of autonomous bodily processes that shape human consciousness. Negative emotions 'warn' the organism to be on its guard, and thus form an important survival mechanism of the human species. In this perspective, emotions can form an indicator of an important issue that is not yet very clear (because it is not entirely articulated) to the individual (Lazarus & Lazarus 1994; Frijda 1989). The point, however, is *not* to first clarify one's feelings in order to be able to make action choices. Feelings can only take shape in interaction with the possible alternatives for action that one knows or discovers (cf. Damasio 1999, p. 33 e.v.). Thus, identity formation is a process in which cognitions and emotions are balanced gradually (Meijers 1998), and in a dialogical way (Hermans & Kempen 1993; Hermans & Hermans-Jansen 2001).

A poem, written by the priest Titus Brandsma in 1942, a few months before his death in a German concentration camp, illustrates this process of balancing. The emotion and the feelings called forth by the emotion – in a sense – form both the beginning and the product of perspective change.

Het leed kwam telkens op mij aan,	Distress approached me time after time
onmogelijk om het af te weren	impossible to ward if off
met geen tranen te bezweren	tears would not avert it
'k had het anders lang gedaan	or I would have done so long ago.
Toen ging het bovenop mij staan	Then it stood on top of me
tot ik stil lag zonder wenen	until I lay silently without weeping
duldend, wachtend moest ik leren	patiently waiting I had to learn
en toen eerst is het heengegaan.	and not until then it departed.
Dat is nu al een poos geleën	All this happened quite some time ago
ik zie het nu van verre nog	I look back upon it from a distance
en ik begrijp niet, waarom toch	and I do not understand why I suffered
ik toen zo leed met veel geween.	so much then and shed so many tears.

Source: B. Borchert (1985).

Suffering that cannot be avoided must be accepted, one must be open to it – not only because it cannot be avoided, but also because it is an ineffable part of spiritual growth. It is part of the formation of a reflexive consciousness that can be characterized as 'wisdom', not as 'cleverness'. *Cleverness* is only the competency of applying existing knowledge and skills in an instrumentally satisfactory way. *Wisdom*, however, may be characterized as the ability to discern the pain behind an existing state of affairs, enabling one to form a mental image of the process of growth and development, and of its consequences. Fear and uncertainty are then viewed as conditions for the formation of a reflexive consciousness; they should not be avoided, nor should they be brought and held under self-reflexive control as quickly as possible. On the contrary, room should be created for them (cf. Gabriel 1983; Fineman 1997; Höpfl & Linstead 1997; Doorewaard 2000).

5. Identity learning: A model

Summarizing the above, identity development based on life experiences can be understood as a learning process that starts with an *experience*, which is coupled with emotion. This may be the experience of an *opportunity* for learning and growth, coupled with positive emotion. Probably more often, however, it is an experience of conflict, shortcoming, or inability, and of *uncertainty*, which is coupled with negative emotions. In both cases it is what Charlotte Bühler called a 'boundary experience': an experience in which the individual experiences the boundary of his existing self-concept (Künkel, no date). This experience happens when a person, trying to participate more fully (centrally) in a social practice, encounters a situation in which he is unable to function adequately because he cannot fully identify with the new situation and its exigencies. This may be a primarily cognitive problem (e.g., not understanding the situation, not having the required knowledge and skills). More often, however, the problem will be of an emotional nature: prior identifications and bonds get in the way – that is, the current identity configuration does not fit the situation (cf. González Rey 1999).

To restore this 'fit', the individual seeks, and constructs, a balance between emotions and cognitions. This can only be done by using, in a heuristic way, concepts and shared meanings that are available in the social environment: one must enter into an existing discourse (Bruner 1990; Hermans & Kempen 1993; Fogel 1993; Hermans 1999). This step, then, can be called 'discursive meaning-giving'. In this process, the individual tries to 'understand' what is happening to him or her by finding – together with others – the concepts that give an explanation that is logically and emotionally satisfactory for all who are involved in this dialogue. The result of this process is mutual

understanding and shared values. However, before this result is reached, an introspective dialogue has to be completed. Understanding a situation is not enough: the situation must make personal (emotional) sense for the individual, so that he is motivated and able to act. This implies that the (role-coupled) exigencies of the situation must not only be understood, but must be given an adequate place in the person's own identity configuration. We call this process 'intuitive sense-giving'.

In this process, the emotions that were evoked by the situation and that are initially not understood, must be made transparent with the help of concepts. Only then can the situation be given a meaningful place in ones' own life history. As Gendlin (1981) has shown, focusing plays an important role in the process of intuitive sense-giving. Briefly, focusing is feeling and getting in touch with an as yet unclear, general bodily notion of some problem. It is active introspection. Based on research, Gendlin distinguishes six movements – or phases – in this process. The first phase is *clearing a space*. Attention is turned inward, into the body, in order to *feel* that which is creating a tension. In the second phase, which he dubs the phase of experiencing a *felt sense for the problem*, attention is turned toward feeling. 'Whatever you may know about the concern you have chosen, since it is a problem it also has an unresolved edge, a *felt sense* of unease, unresolvedness [. . .] You need to sense something quite concrete and more meaningful than you can as yet say or define' (Gendlin 1996, p. 72). In the third phase, that of *getting a handle on it*, a word, sentence, or image must arise out of the 'experienced feeling', a word or image that one feels captures exactly the quality of the felt sense. In the fourth phase, *resonating the handle*, one checks whether the word or image does indeed fit: it should bring a sense of relief. In the fifth phase, *asking* is central: what is it in the whole problem that determines this quality (as conceptualized or imagined in the previous phase)? If this phase is successfully carried through, the result is a shift, a perspective transformation. In the sixth phase, *receiving*, one considers this shift.

Central in Gendlin's approach – which he and his collaborators developed on the basis of empirical research of the 'success factors' of psychotherapy – is the step that forces the individual to consider the physical experience that the emotion brings about, and to attach symbols, metaphors and/or concepts to it. This approach is closely in keeping with the work of Lévi-Strauss (1985), who showed the deep structure of culture to consist of symbols that attempt to articulate or represent sensory reality. In a Dutch study on effective psychotherapy, Van Loon (1996) showed that clients use symbols that have an inherent power for restructuring the life story of the individual. Expressing their experiences in symbols enables individuals to change their perspective. All of this is also in keeping with the work of Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995),

who showed innovations in businesses to often be the result of attempts to articulate unconscious experiential knowledge (i.e., so-called tacit knowledge consisting of subjective insight, intuition, and sudden ideas). Tacit knowledge is very difficult to share with others, in part, because the individual often has little or no insight into how particular ideas or decisions arise. Tacit knowledge can only be acquired with practice, through trial and error, imitation, and intensive co-operation. Metaphors and analogies play an essential role in the process of articulating tacit knowledge (and also making a connection between this knowledge and codified knowledge). Metaphors and analogies actually appear to be more important than precise definitions. Metaphors help individuals from different backgrounds to intuitively understand something through the use of symbols and the power of imagination. Analysis and generalization only become important later in the process of innovation. Via metaphors, individuals bring what they already know together in a different manner and start to express what they know but cannot put into words. Analogies are more structured; they make the similarities and differences between ideas clear and, in this way, constitute an intermediate step between imaginative power and logical thinking.

To sum up, identity construction is seen to be a circular learning process, in which experiences and the self-concept are related through using concepts and endowing them with personal sense. In this process, identifications with persons, roles, organizations, values, and the like are constituted by reinterpretation of the self and the situation. Identity is a configuration of meanings, but this configuration will change constantly when new elements are given a place and are related to experiences. The inverse also applies: concepts and meanings that are available, but cannot be related to experiences and thus are not given a personal sense, will not become a part of the identity configuration. The above can be depicted schematically as in Figure 1 (cf. Meijers 1998 for an earlier version).

6. Conditions for acquiring a career identity

For the individual to be able to carry out the processes of discursive meaning-giving and intuitive sense-giving in an adequate way, and thus to construct a career identity that enables the individual to find his way in turbulent and insecure labor relations, at least three conditions must be fulfilled.

First of all, there must be an opportunity to undergo boundary experiences and to give them meaning with the help of a culturally available array of meanings. This implies that some sort of 'peripheral legitimate participation' (Lave & Wenger 1991) in communities of practice (i.e., in the activities of groups of experienced practitioners) must be possible. In

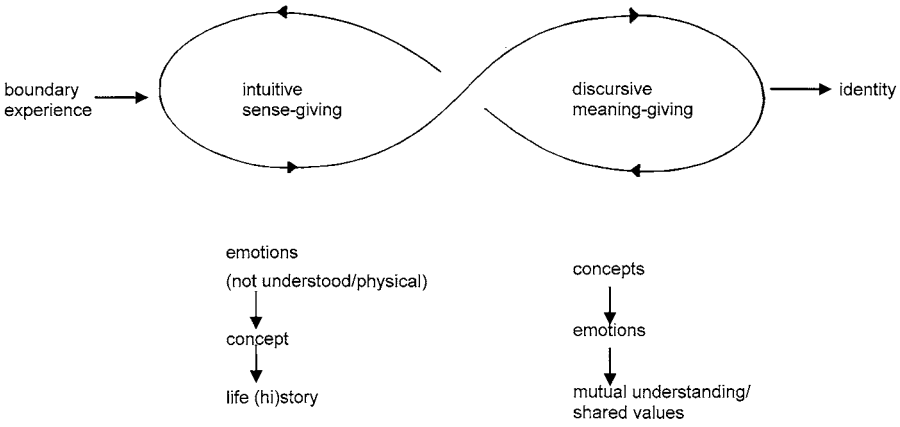

Figure 1. Identity as a learning process.

some case, this participation may be of a simulated or virtual nature. The problem in post-industrialized societies is, of course, that young people acquire little experience in the "domain" of work, and can profit little from the out-dated experience of their families. The domain of work has largely become unknown due to the four reasons. Firstly, work has become invisible to many youth, because it has been moved from the home to the factory or office. Therefore, work as well as the community of practice is hidden behind uniform walls, which neither gives any indication of what exactly is being done in the building, nor of what value that activity might have for society in general. Secondly, work has become more of a terra incognita because many professions are disappearing. A profession mostly represents a clear social role. In 1976, the Netherlands counted 5,500 professions and several thousand functions (Wiegersma & Van Bochove 1976, p. 14). In 1998, there were only 1211 professions and about 23,000 functions (CBS 1999). Thirdly, the development of mass education, since the 1950's and 1960's, has made work unknown. Education has developed into a 'pedagogical reserve' because it is built upon two self-evident pillars: "the primacy of theory above experience" and "from simple to complex". In other words, youth must first be able to reproduce theoretical knowledge before they are allowed to function in actual working-situations. In addition, their learning environment is so structured that participation in an actual community of practice is only allowed at the end of their learning process (Geurts & Meijers 2002). And, lastly, work is unknown to most youth due to a continually lengthened period of adolescence ("youth as moratorium") in which being young is associated with having fun ('Forever young') (Meijers 1992). Even work experience programs and casual work in the weekends or after school do not help much. They are

cognitively unchallenging, are not future-related, and do not challenge values and norms set up by earlier learning (Greenberger & Steinberg 1986).

The second condition that has to be fulfilled to enable the individual to carry out the processes of discursive meaning-giving and intuitive sense-giving in an adequate way, and thus to construct a career identity, is that there must be opportunity and room for using the imagination, because the coupling between emotions and meanings is by no means obvious. Damasio (1999) relates using one's imagination to being able to transcent the given reality, to build an insightful appreciation of how things might become and how one could play a role in this becoming.

The third condition that we are able to identify for the sense-giving process is an emotionally 'safe' environment. This is not an environment that protects the individual from pain and uncertainty, because those are important starting points for the whole process. Rather, it is an environment that allows the individual to handle such emotions in a productive and creative way, and 'shares' them so that the burden becomes lighter. 'Let us put emotion in motion' should become our motto. However, this is only possible under certain conditions (Doorewaard 2000, pp. 44–45):

- emotions have to be valued; in other words, all those involved in a social interaction should be grateful that emotions exist.
- emotions should be treated with caution. They are often extremely powerful motives for the behavior of individuals. When an emotion is ignored or even denied, it can be turned against the organization which allowed this denial to occur: this may often result in the paralysis of not only the individual himself, but also of his environment.
- emotions demand respect or, in other words, concentrated attention. Many people feel uncomfortable when someone nearby shows some emotional involvement. The tendency to quickly move on to something else is then dominant. However, if emotions are ever to become a functional part of the learning process whereby a career identity may be constructed, then attention has to be paid to them. One should not try to suppress these emotions, but rather to use them to illuminate the message that they are carrying (see also Ashforth & Humphrey 1995, p. 97).

The marketization of career guidance services, which has occurred in a number o European countries in recent years, has resulted in lean career services (Bartlett, Rees & Watts 2000; Meijers 2001). A marketized career service is often forced by its commissioners and administrators to provide 'cheap' services, which means that there is only room for a very cognitive approach. Enabling an 'informed choice' as efficient and quickly as possible, is the pivot upon which everything turns (Law 2000). It seems – at present – almost impossible to create guidance services for emotions. If our ideas hold,

however, it seems imperative that the role of emotions be recognized both in practice and in theory.

Note

[1] In the Netherlands, the number of such jobs has been declining due to a shortage of workers, from 10.1% in 1996 to 7.5% in 1998) (OSA 2000), and is only now expected to rise again.

References

Alsaker, F.D. & Flammer, A. (1999). *The adolescent experience*. London: Erlbaum.

Arthur, M. (1994). The boundaryless career: a new perspective for organizational inquiry. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 15: 295–306.

Arthur, M., Inkson, K. & Pringle, J. (1999). *The new careers – individual action and economic change*. London: Sage.

Ashforth, B.E. & Humphrey, R.H. (1995). Emotion in the workplace: A reappraisal. *Journal of Management* 17: 99–120.

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social-cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Barlett, W., Rees, T. & Watts, A.G. (2000). *Adult guidance services and the learning society. Emerging policies in the European Union*. Bristol: The Policy Press.

Beck, U. (1994). The reinvention of politics: Towards a theory of reflexive modernization. In U. Beck, A. Giddens & S. Lash (eds.), *Reflexive modernization* (pp. 1–56). Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bellman, G. (1996). *Your signature path: Gaining new perspectives on life and work*. San Francisco: Beret-Koehler Publishers.

Boekaerts, M. (1996). Subjective competence, appraisals and self-assessment. *Learning and Instruction* 1: 1–17.

Borchert, B. (1985). *Titus Brandsma, 'Mystiek Leven': een bloemlezing* (Titus Brandsma, 'Mystical life: an anthology). Deel 21 van de reeks 'Spiritualiteit: teksten van en over innerlijk leven'. Nijmegen: B. Gottmer.

Bridges, W. (1994). *JobShift: How to prosper in a workforce without jobs*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Bros, L. (2001). *Reproductie of emancipatie? Loopbanen van de Enschedese schoolgeneratie 1964*. (Reproduction or emancipation?) Leuven/Apeldoorn: Garant.

Bruner, J. (1990). *Acts of meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Buzzi, C., Cavailli, A. & De Lillo, A. (1997). *Giovani verso il Duemila*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

Byars, A.M. & Hackett, G. (1998). Application of social cognitive theory to the career development of women of colour. *Applied & Preventive Psychology* 7: 255–267.

Castells, N. (1998). *End of millennium: The information age – economy, society and culture*, Vol. 3. Oxford: Blackwell.

CBS (1999). *Standard Beroepenclassificatie 1998* (Standard Occupational Classification 1998). Rijswijk/Heerlen: CBS.

CBS (2001). *Statistisch Jaarboek 2001* (Statistical Yearbook 2001). Voorburg/Heerlen: Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek.

Choquet, M. & Ledoux, S. (1994). *Adolescents. Enquête National* (National survey on adolescents). Paris: INSERM.

Collin, A. & Young, R. (2000). *The future of career*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Damasio, A. (1999). *The feeling of what happens. Body, emotion, and the making of consciousness*. London: Heinemann.

Deutsche, S. (ed.) (2000). *Jugend 2000. 13. Shell Jugendstudie* (youth 2000, 13th Shell youth study). Opladen: Leske + Budrich.

Dieleman, A. (2000). Individualisering en ambivalentie in het bestaan van jongeren (Individualization and ambivalence in the life of youngsters). *Pedagogiek* 20(2): 91–112.

Dincher, R. (1987). *Berufkundliche Information und Berufswahl von Abiturienten. Empirische Studie zur Bedeutung der personalen und medialen Berufswahlhilfen*. Nürnberg: Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung.

Doorewaard, H. (2000). *De andere organisatie . . . en wat heft liefde er nou mee te maken?* (The other organization. . . what has love got to do with it?) Utrecht: Lemma.

Drucker, P.F. (1993). *The post-capitalist society*. Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann.

Elchardus, M. et al. (1997). *Jongeren en cultuur in beweging* (Youth and culture in movement). Leuven: Davidsfonds.

Ellström, P.E. (1999). *Integration learning and work: problems and prospects*. Paper presented at EARLI conference, Gothenburg, Sweden, August 24–28.

Erikson, E. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York: Norton.

Eurobarometer (1997). *Young Europeans in 1997*. Paris: INRA.

Faulkner, W. (1930). *As I lay dying*. New York: Random House.

Fineman, S. (1997). Emotion and management learning. *Management Learning* 28(1): 13–25.

Fleege, U.H. (1945). *Self-revelation of the adolescent boy*. Milwaukee: Little Brown.

Fogel, A. (1993). *Developing through relationships: Origins of communication, self, and culture*. Hertsfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Friebel, H., Epskamp, H., Knobloch, B., Montag, S. & Toth, S. (2000). *Bildungsbeteiligung: Chancen und Risiken. Eine Längsschnittstudie über Bildungs- und Weiterbildungskarrieren in der 'Moderne'*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.

Frijda, N. (1989). *The emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gabriel, Y. (1983). *Freud and society*. London: Routledge.

Gendlin, E.T. (1981). *Focusing*, 2nd edition. New York: Everest House.

Gendlin, E.T. (1996). *Focusing-oriented psychotherapy*. New York: Guilford Press.

Geurts, J. & Meijers, F. (2002). Auf dem Weg zu einem neuen pädagogischen Schwung in der Niederländischen Berufsausbildung. *Recht der Jugend und des Bildungswesens* (in press).

Gibson, J.T., Westwood, M.J. & Ishiyama, I. et al. (1991). Youth and culture: A seventeen nation study of perceived problems and coping strategies. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling* 14: 203–216.

Gibson, J.T., Bakker, C.E. & Showalter, S. et al. (1992). Gender and culture: reported problems, coping strategies and selected helpers of male and female adolescents in 17 countries. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling* 15: 137–149.

González Rey, F.L. (1999). Personality, subject and human development: The subjective character of human activity. In S. Chaiklin, M. Hedegaard & U.J. Jensen (eds.), *Activity theory and social practice: Cultural-historical approaches*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press.

Gottfredson, L.S. (1981). Circumscription and compromise: A developmental theory of occupational aspirations. *Journal of Counselling Psychology* [Monograph] 28: 545–579.

Greenberger, E. & Steinberg, L. (1986). *When teenagers work; The psychological and social costs of adolescent employment*. New York: Basic Books.

Grusky, D. & Rice, E. (1998). Generation X not so special: Malaise, cynicism on the rise for all age groups. www.standford.edu/news/relaged/ 980821genx.html.

Hall, D. (1996). *The career is dead – Long live the career*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Hansen, S. (1999). Beyond school to work: Continuing contributions of theory and practice to career development of youth. *The Career Development Quarterly* 47: 353–359.

Heinz, W., Krüger, H., Rettke, U., Wachtveitl, E. & Witzel, A. (1985). *Hauptsache eine Lehrstelle. Jugendliche vor den Hürden des Arbeitsmarkts*. Weinheim und Basel: Beltz.

Heitmeyer, W. et al. (1995). *Gewalt: Schattenseiten der Individualisierung bei Jugendlichen aus unterschiedlichen Milieus*. München: Juventa Verlag.

Hermans, H. (1999). Dialogical thinking and self-innovation. *Culture & Psychology* 5: 67–87.

Hermans, H. & Kempen, H. (1993). *The dialogical self; meaning as movement*. San Diego: Academic Press.

Hermans, H. & Hermans-Jansen, E. (2001). Dialogical processes and the development of the self. In J. Valsiner & K.J. Connolly (eds.), *Handbook of developmental psychology*. London: Sage.

Holland, D., Lachicotte, W. Jr., Skinner, D. & Cain, C. (1998). *Identity and agency in cultural worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Holtappels, H., Heitmeyer, W., Melzer, W. & Tillmann, K. (eds.) (1997). *Forschung über Gewalt an Schulen. Erscheinungsformen und Ursachen, Konzepte und Prävention*. München: Juventa Verlag.

Höpfl, H. & Linstead, S. (1997). Introduction. Learning to feel and feeling to learn: emotion and learning in organizations. *Management Learning* 28: 5–12.

Jugendwerk der Deutschen Shell (1997). *Jugend '97. Zukunftsperspektiven, Gesellschaftliches Engagement, Politische Orientierungen*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.

Keesels, J. & Poell, R. (eds.) (2001). *Human resource development – Organiseren van het leren* (HRD – Organisation of learning). Alphen a/d Rijn: Samsom.

Krumboltz, J.D. (1996). A learning theory of career counseling. In M.L. Savickas & W.B. Walsh (eds.), *Handbook of career counseling theory and practice* (pp. 55–80). Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black.

Krumboltz, J.D. & Worthington, R. (1999). The school-to-work transition from a learning theory perspective. *Career Development Quarterly* 47: 312–326.

Kübler-Ross, E. (1971). *Lessen voor levanden. Gesprekken met stervenden* (Lessons for the living. Conversations with the dying). Bilthoven: Ambo.

Künkel, F. (no date). *Karakter, Groei en Opvoeding* (Character, growth and education). Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek.

Lange, E. & Neuser, H. (1985). Die Berufswahlvorbereitung durch Berufsberatung und Schule: Bestandsaufnahme und Ansätze zur Weiterentwicklung. Teil I. *Mitteilungen aus der Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung* 18(2): 233–246.

Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning; legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Law, B. (2000). Careers-Work Policy – from alpha to omega. *Careers Adviser* 4(2): 4–8.

Lazarus, R.S. & Lazarus, B.N. (1994). *Passion and reason*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Lehr, U. (1978). Das mittlere Erwachsenenalter; ein vernachlässigtes Gebiet der Entwicklungspsychologie. In R. Oerter (ed.), *Entwiclung als lebenslanger Prozess*. Hamburg: Hoffmann & Campe.

Lent, R.W., Brown, S.D. & Hackett, G. (1994). Toward a unifying social cognitive theory of career and academic interest, choice and performance [Monograph]. *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 45: 79–122.

Lent, R.W., Hackett, G. & Brown, S.D. (1999). A social-cognitive view of school-to-work transition. *The Career Development Quarterly* 47: 297–311.

Lévi-Strauss, C. (1985). *The View from afar*. New York: Basic Books.

Lyotard, J.-F. (1984). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Lyotard, J.-F. (1992). *The postmodern explained to children*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press.

Marcia, J.E. (1966). Development and validation of ego identity status. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 3: 551–558.

Marcia, J.E. (1980). Identity in adolescence. In J. Adelson (ed.), *Handbook of adolescent psychology* (pp. 158–187). New York: Wiley.

Meijers, F. (1992). 'Being young' in the life perceptions of Dutch, Moroccan, Turkish and Surinam youngsters. In W. Meeus, M. de Goede, W. Kox & K. Hurrelmann (eds.), *Adolescence, careers, and cultures* (pp. 353–373). Berlin/New York: De Gruyter.

Meijers, F. (1995). *Arbeidsidentiteit; studie- en beroepskeuze in de post-industriële samenleving* (Career identity; career guidance in post-industrial society). Alphen a/d Rijn: Samsom H.D. Tjeenk Willink.

Meijers, F. (1998). The development of a career identity. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling* 20: 191–207.

Meijers, F. (2001). The effects of the marketisation of career guidance services in the Netherlands. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling* 23: 131–149.

Mezirow, J. (1985). A critical theory of self-directed learning. In S. Brookfield (ed.), *Self-directed learning: From theory to practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Nonaka, I. & Takeuchi, H. (1995). *The knowledge creating company*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Onstenk, J. (1997). *Lerend leren werken. Brede vakbekwaamheid en de integratie van leren, werken en innoveren* (Learning and work. The integration of learning, work and innovation) (PhD thesis). Delft: Eburon.

Organisatie voor Strategisch Arbeidsmarktonderzoek/OSA (2000). *OSA- Arbeidsaanbodpanel* (OSA-Labour Supply Panel)'s-Gravenhage: OSA.

Pearson, L. (ed.) (1969). *Death and dying. Current issues in the treatment of the dying person*. Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University Press.

Pinker, S. (1997). *How the mind works*. London: Penguin.

Polkinghorne, D.E. (1988). *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. New York: SUNY Press.

Pulley, M. (1997). *Losing your job – reclaiming your soul. Stories of resilience, renewal and hope*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Sarges, W., Birkhan, G. & Klevenow, G.-H. (1989). *Analyse der beruflichen Einzelberatung; Bedarf, Vermittlung und Funktion von Informationen*. BeitrAB 134. Nürnberg: Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung.

Scholierenonderzoek 1994 [Student survey 1994]. Leiden: University of Leiden.

Shepard, M. (1975). *Someone you love is dying*. New York: Crown Publishers.

Simon, H.A. (1976) *Administrative behavior*. New York: The Free Press.

Simons, P.R.J. (2000). Towards a constructivistic theory of self-directed learning. In G. Straka (ed.), *Self-learning*. Münster: Waxmann.

Singerling, E. & De Kleer, E. (2000). *Ken- en Stuurgetallen Personeelsmanagement* (Facts and figures personnel management). Samsom: Alphen a/d Rijn.

Van der Linden, F. (1991). *Adolescent life world. A selection of social-ecological studies*. Amsterdam/Lisse: Swets & Zeitlinger.

Van Loon, R. (1996). *Symbolen in het zelfverhaal. Een interpretatiemodel met behulp van de zelfkonfrontatiemethode* (Symbols in the story about the self; an interpretative model using the self confrontation method). Assen: Van Gorcum.

Wallulis, J. (1998). *The new insecurity – The end of the standard job and family*. New York: New York Press.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice – learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wiegersma, S. & Bochove, P. van (1976). *De wereld der beroepen* (The world of occupations). Haarlem: De Toorts.

Wittebrood, K. & Keuzenkamp, S. (red.) (2000). *Rapportage Jeugd 2000. Trajecten van jongeren naar zelfstandigheid* (Report Youth 2000. Trajectories of youngsters towards independence). Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau.

Wijers, G., & Meijers, F. (1996). Careers guidance in the knowledge society. *British Journal of Guidance and Counsellling* 24: 209–222.